

DOCUMENT RESUME

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[Survey of the Army's Actions to Modernize Its Food Service Program]. B-146700; LCD-77-403. January 24, 1977. 6 pp.

Report to Secretary, Department of Defense; by Robert G. Rothwell (for Fred J. Shafer, Director, Logistics and Communications Div.).

Issue Area: Facilities and Material Management (700); Military Preparedness Plans (800).

Contact: Logistics and Communications Div.

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Organization Concerned: Department of the Army.

Congressional Relevance: House Committee on Armed Services; Senate Committee on Armed Services.

The Army's attempts to modernize its food service program were surveyed, with emphasis on the central food preparation concept recommended for testing 12 years ago. The central food preparation concept consists of two projects: a central food processing facility which centrally prepares food items for distribution to satellite dining facilities, and the establishment of a Director of Food Management in charge of all food-related activities. Findings/Conclusions: Two aspects of the central food preparation concept--central tableware wash and automated head count--have been tested and have failed, because the equipment used was inadequate, incompatible, or had been tested commercially. The main test of the central food processing facility is still being made. The Director of Food Management test has proven successful at one point, but the Army has been reluctant to test it elsewhere. The Army has spent almost \$200 million to upgrade and modernize existing dining halls and to construct new facilities. It appears that \$24 million of this was for the purchase and installation of new equipment. Recommendations: Thorough testing of the central food service concept should be expedited and completed, followed by decisions concerning the future direction of Army food service policy. (RBS)

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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

LOGISTICS AND COMMUNICATIONS
DIVISION

JAN 24 1977

B-146700

The Honorable
The Secretary of Defense

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We surveyed the Army's attempts to modernize its food service program (Code 947190), including its efforts to modernize dining facilities and to test and implement a central food preparation concept. Although we anticipate no additional survey work at this time, our observations may be helpful in assessing whether the Army's modernization program is progressing adequately.

The objectives of the Army's modernization programs are to (1) help revitalize the troop food service system through use of modern decor, facilities, equipment, and food preparation procedures, (2) reduce troop irritants in connection with food service facilities, (3) increase professionalism among food service personnel, with emphasis on training, and (4) reduce cost.

The Army has substantially improved selected aspects of its food service operation. It has modernized dining decor, installed "state-of-the-art" equipment, upgraded training of cooks, and improved sanitation and meal preparation. However, serious problems have arisen in testing and implementing some of the Army's modernization concepts and coordinating them with other food service programs.

One project in particular, the central food preparation concept recommended for testing 12 years ago, has not been implemented because various commands within the Army disagree on its feasibility. Problems with this concept remain unresolved.

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Despite these unresolved matters, the Army is investing in other modernization programs which conflict with the central food preparation concept and other food service programs. Without adequately coordinating these programs and pursuing the issues which need to be resolved, the Army may be investing large sums of money in unneeded facilities and equipment.

BACKGROUND

In 1975 the Army's food service program, the 14th largest in the food industry, operated about 1,400 dining facilities, served more than 241 million meals, and cost \$428 million to manage. With this scope of operation, the Army sought to reduce food service cost and at the same time improve dining room attendance.

Since 1965 numerous studies have been performed, weaknesses identified, and recommendations made in military food services management. Studies made by a management consultant firm recommended in 1965 and again in 1969 that the Department of Defense test a central food preparation system to provide, at reduced cost, a food service operation at a central location instead of at individual dining halls. Under this system, central preparation would be followed by distribution of food items to various dining facilities on base.

The Army established a Subsistence Operations Review Board in November 1970 to investigate the adequacy of the Army's food service program. The Board's June 1971 report identified various weaknesses, such as poor food quality and service, unattractive eating environment, and unsatisfactory supervision of dining facilities. To correct these problems, the Board, like the management consultant firm, suggested that the Army adopt a central food processing system. It also recommended that certain "quick-fix" actions be taken immediately.

The Army estimated that costs for its modernization program--modern decor, new equipment, upgraded training--will amount to \$186 million over the 6-year period from 1972 through 1977. It realized that these changes were necessary to attract and retain soldiers in today's modern volunteer Army and to maintain a first-class feeding operation. At the same time, it wanted to give its soldiers

the latitude to choose from a wider variety of menu items and to select "short-order" items similar to those provided in the civilian sector. The Army made several efforts to achieve these results.

PROBLEMS IN TESTING AND
IMPLEMENTING MODERNIZATION
CONCEPTS

The Army began evaluating the central food preparation concept in 1970. Although it has been working on this concept for more than six years and has yet to decide on its feasibility, the Army still continues to invest in food facilities, equipment, and personnel to test and implement the concept.

Central food preparation

The use of a central food preparation concept was recommended on several different occasions starting as far back as 1965. Various aspects of the concept have been tested successfully, others have been tested and failed, and some have not been tested. Completion of the tests is not anticipated until early 1978.

The central food preparation concept consists of two projects. The first, a central food processing facility which centrally prepares selected food items for distribution to satellite dining facilities, includes:

1. Satellite dining facilities; that is, the existing dining halls where centrally prepared food will be reheated and served.
2. Central "warewash," which cleans all tableware at a central location.
3. Management information systems to better quantify the food portions required. A main feature of this system is the automated head-count, which uses individual data processing cards as means of signing for a meal.

The second project, the establishment of a Director of Food Management, places all food-related activities at an installation under one person.

The central warewash and automated head-count have been tested and have failed because the equipment used for the tests was inadequate, incompatible, or had not been tested commercially. The main test of the central food processing facility is still being made. Initially, the facility was planned to be installed at 24 individual locations at a cost of \$173.3 million, but the Army has delayed further estimates until the test is complete. The Director of Food Management test has proven successful at one location, but the Army has been reluctant to expand it elsewhere.

While the Army has been investing to test and implement the central food preparation concept, it has also been spending almost \$200 million to upgrade and modernize existing dining halls and to construct new facilities. Since the Army records we reviewed generally reflect total project costs, we could not readily extract all pertinent costs related to purchase and installation of new equipment. From the records which provided the data, we identified at least \$24 million for such equipment. Because an objective of the central food concept involves transferring food service personnel from the existing dining hall environment to a central location, equipment bought under the dining facility modernization program might not be used as intended.

Current Army plans show that 429 dining facilities are expected to be completed by the early 1980s under the modernization program. If the central food concept is adopted, the first unit will operate by 1983. Unless the Army acts decisively to clear up this conflict, investments in these programs could be unnecessary or questionable. Stronger coordination efforts are necessary to avoid or minimize this problem.

Delay in implementing workable concepts

The Subsistence Operations Review Board also recommended in 1971 that the Army establish a Directorate for Food Management at all of its installations. Under this system, an installation's food service activities would be centralized in one office rather than controlled separately by each company commander.

The testing of this concept began in 1972. Since then many benefits have been reported, such as increased food service management attention, improved service in dining facilities, and more efficient allocation of funds, personnel, and equipment. In addition, the Army estimated that the use of this concept could save \$3.9 million annually at one installation.

The Army, however, has been reluctant to expand this concept to other locations. Its reasons for the delay are unclear. Army officials told us in November 1976 that it is not convinced of the relative merits to be gained by expanding the concept Army-wide. They believe more study of the matter is warranted.

OTHER PROGRAMS

The Army is conducting other tests in its food service operations which could conflict with its dining facility modernization projects and with the central food preparation concept. Without adequately coordinating various food service projects, the Army could implement potential programs which could adversely affect other programs and could also result in unnecessary investments.

For example, the Army in 1974 began to test the possibility of reducing food service personnel by consolidating its field feeding operations at the battalion level, thus freeing more support personnel for combat roles. Under this concept, the food is prepared at one location and then transported to the individual units in insulated containers for serving to the soldiers. According to the Army's estimates, the consolidation actions, if implemented, could result in manpower reductions of 37 percent in cooks and 58 percent in mess attendants.

Discussions held during our study suggest that the Army is aware of the various problems we have summarized above. Our survey was not in sufficient depth to pinpoint the specific management weaknesses mitigating against timely resolution of the problems, although lack of resolution of differences of opinion among various Army components seems to be a contributing factor.

We believe that thorough testing of the central food service concept should be expedited and completed, followed by decisions concerning the future direction of Army food service policy. We say this because food preparation capabilities in individual dining facilities could be rendered obsolete if central food processing proves practicable.

During our survey, we examined several Army modernization actions at the Troop Support Agency and Quartermaster School, Fort Lee, Virginia. We reviewed pertinent documents and records, and interviewed agency officials. We visited the Army Training and Doctrine Command, Fort Monroe, Virginia; and Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

We would appreciate being informed of any actions you may take in connection with this letter. We appreciate the courtesies and cooperation extended to us by the Army.

Sincerely yours,



for F. J. Shafer
Director